

wherein:

$n$  is at least 2,

each of  $L^1-L^n$  is independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, hydroxy,  $(C_1-C_4)$  alkanoyl, naturally occurring nucleobases, non-naturally occurring nucleobases, aromatic moieties, DNA intercalators, nucleobase-binding groups, heterocyclic moieties, and reporter ligands, at least one of  $L^1-L^n$  being said base substituted with at least one sterically bulky substituent;

each of  $C^1-C^n$  is  $(CR^6R^7)_y$ , where  $R^6$  is hydrogen and  $R^7$  is selected from the group consisting of the side chains of naturally occurring alpha amino acids, or  $R^6$  and  $R^7$  are independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen,  $(C_2-C_6)$  alkyl, aryl, aralkyl, heteroaryl, hydroxy,  $(C_1-C_6)$  alkoxy,  $(C_1-C_6)$  alkylthio,  $NR^3R^4$  and  $SR^5$ , where  $R^3$  and  $R^4$  independently are hydrogen, a conjugate,  $(C_1-C_6)$  alkyl, hydroxy- or alkoxy- or alkylthio- substituted  $(C_1-C_4)$  alkyl, hydroxy, alkoxy, alkylthio or amino; and  $R^5$  is hydrogen,  $(C_1-C_6)$  alkyl, hydroxy-, alkoxy-, or alkylthio- substituted  $(C_1-C_6)$  alkyl, or  $R^6$  and  $R^7$  taken together complete an alicyclic or heterocyclic system;

each of  $D^1-D^n$  is  $(CR^6R^7)_z$  where  $R^6$  and  $R^7$  are as defined above;

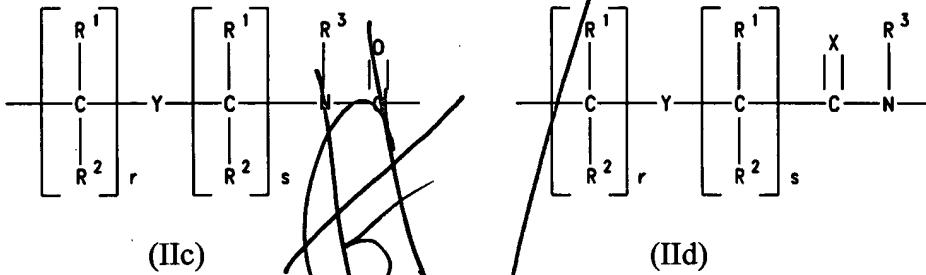
each of y and z is zero or an integer from 1 to 10, the sum y + z being greater than 2 but not more than 10;

each of  $G^1-G^{n-1}$  is  $-NR^3CO-$ ,  $-NR^3CS-$ ,  $-NR^3SO-$  or  $-NR^3SO_2^-$ , in either orientation, where  $R^3$  is as defined above;

each pair of  $A^1-A^n$  and  $B^1-B^n$  are selected such that:

(a) A is a group of formula (IIc) and B is N or  $R^3N^+$ ; or

(b) A is a group of formula (IId) and B is  $CH_2$ ;



where:

$X$  is O, S, Se,  $NR^3$ ,  $CH_2$  or  $C(CH_3)_2$ ;

$Y$  is a single bond, O, S or  $NR^4$ ;

each of  $p$  and  $q$  is zero or an integer from 1 to 5;

each of  $r$  and  $s$  is zero or an integer from 1 to 5;

each  $R^1$  and  $R^2$  is independently selected from the group consisting of hydrogen,  $(C_1-C_4)$ alkyl which may be hydroxy- or alkoxy- or alkylthio-substituted, hydroxy, alkoxy, alkylthio, amino and halogen;

[each of  $G^1-G^{n-1}$  is  $-NR^3CO-$ ,  $-NR^3CS-$ ,  $-NR^3SO-$  or  $-NR^3SO_2^-$ , in either orientation, where  $R^3$  is a sterically bulky substituent containing 3 or more non-hydrogen atoms;]